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Variability in negation in African American Vernacular English

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ABSTRACT

For quantitative sociolinguists, one of the goals of investigating variability in African American Vernacular English (AAVE) is to understand better the nature of the grammar. Specifically, researchers have been interested in whether the variation observed in AAVE is inherent to a single system or the result of interaction between two separate systems of AAVE and Standard English (SE). Variability in negation is an area of the AAVE grammar that has received minimal attention, but one that may offer some interesting insights into the nature of the system or systems at work. This article provides a framework to describe the variability between negative auxiliaries in predicative constructions based on a quantitative analysis of data collected in Columbus, Ohio. Five variables are investigated in this study. One involves interaction between third-person singular inflection and non-inflection in present *do*-support constructions (NEG PRES). A second involves variation between *ain't* and *don't* with the predicates *got* or *gotta* (NEG GOT(TA)). And the other three involve interaction between *ain't* and negative auxiliaries in present copular (NEG COP), present perfect (NEG PERF), and past *do*-support (NEG PAST) constructions. The results of this study show that, with the possible exception of the (NEG PRES) variation, these alternations all appear to belong to one underlying system.

Over the years, much of the research on African American Vernacular English (AAVE) has centered around a debate over its synchronic status and its diachronic development. Early on, two opposing theories emerged in the literature in response to these issues. At one extreme was the position that AAVE is rooted in the varieties of English spoken in the British Isles (Kurath, 1949; McDavid, 1969) and shares the same underlying grammar as other varieties of English, but with different surface realizations of certain forms (Labov, 1972a). At the other extreme was the position that AAVE developed out of a creole language spoken during the times of slavery (Dillard, 1972) and functions as a separate and autonomous system, with a different under-

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lying grammar from dialects of English (B. Bailey, 1965; Stewart, 1967, 1968). Later studies hinted at the notion of a "consensus" between these two opposing camps, such that many of the creole features of AAVE were said to have undergone "decreolization" to the point where contemporary AAVE could be described as a dialect of English (Fasold, 1981; Labov, 1982). However, this position also became subject to an adequate amount of debate, which was particularly complicated by claims that black vernaculars and white vernaculars were, in fact, "diverging" from one another (G. Bailey & Maynor, 1987; Labov & Harris, 1986).

As a result, it has become increasingly unclear what implications can be drawn from the synchronic data about the origins of AAVE. Nevertheless, studies of its variability have proven enlightening to our understanding of its synchronic nature. Out of these debates, a number of studies have emerged which examine the patterns of categorical and variable behavior in areas of the AAVE grammar such as copular usage, person–number agreement, and tense marking. However, an area of the grammar that has received minimal attention is variability in negation. Although this topic has been addressed in previous literature, it has been handled marginally in studies of specific types of variation such as copular variability or variability in *-s* marking or it has been included in more comprehensive reports of the AAVE grammar (e.g., Labov, Cohen, Robins, & Lewis, 1968; Fasold, 1972; Wolfram, 1969). However, I believe a more detailed analysis of the variation between negative auxiliaries in AAVE should enhance our understanding of the system(s) at work.

In this article, I provide a comprehensive quantitative analysis of variability in predicate negation and develop a framework to describe the distribution of the negative forms. The analysis is based on 907 tokens of negation which were extracted from 12 hours of conversation in a dialect of AAVE spoken in Columbus, Ohio. For each of the variables presented in this study, I consider whether the variation is best analyzed as belonging to a single system (i.e., the monosystemic account) or to two separate systems (i.e., the bisystemic account).[1] And I show that the monosystemic account best describes the nature of the variability at work in these data.

THE DATA

This analysis is restricted to variability in the negation of copular and noncopular predicates in fully tensed indicative clauses. Such constructions exhibit patterns of variation not found in other types of negation. Negated quantifiers and adverbials such as *not many* and *not often*, inherently negative quantifiers and adverbs such as *none* and *never*, negated modals such as *couldn't*, *shouldn't*, and *can't*, and negated infinitival constructions are excluded from this analysis because they exhibit either categorical negation or some form of lexical variation.

(1) a. Negated quantifier *Not many of you could see it.*
b. Negated adverbial *Not often do you find these on sale.*
c. Negative quantifier *None of you can attend the party.*
d. Negative adverb *I never use that brand.*
e. Negated modal auxiliary *You would not want them in your room.*
f. Negated infinitival *They told us not to come.*

This study is also restricted to declarative constructions, thus excluding from the quantitative analysis any negative forms found in negated commands, negative inversion, *yes–no* interrogatives, *wh-* questions, and tags. Some of these constructions exhibit patterns of variation similar to those that are the focus of this study. However, the data lack a sufficient number of these tokens to allow for their inclusion in the quantitative analysis.

(2) a. Negated command *Don't put your shoes up there.*
b. Negative inversion *Ain't no speakers on it.*
c. *Yes–no* interrogative *Wasn't that a twenty or a twenty-two?*
d. *Wh-* question *Why don't you go ask people for change?*
e. Tag question *It's just a flower show, isn't it?*

In total, five variables are analyzed in this study: one in copular constructions and four in non-copular constructions.[2] For the copular constructions, the variable analysis is confined to sentences with present time reference, as past tense copular constructions involve practically no variability.

(3) a. That was not him.
b. It wasn't too long.
c. You wasn't there.
d. We were talking about her. But we wasn't talking to her.
e. No, he wasn't gon take them in the house.
f. But my drawers weren't like that.

There are 36 negative tokens in past tense copular constructions.[3] Of this total, six sentences contain either plural or second-person singular subjects, which in SE would require *weren't*. However, in these environments there are five tokens of *wasn't* and only one token of *weren't* (see sentence (3f)). It appears, therefore, that *wasn't* is the near-categorical negative auxiliary in past tense copular constructions.[4]

In present tense copular constructions, on the other hand, there is variability among negative full copular forms (*am not*, *is not*, *are not*, *isn't*, *aren't*), negative contracted copular forms (*'m not*, *'s not*, *'re not*), the form *not*, and the form *ain't*. This variation is called (NEG COP).

(4)
Full copula
a. I am not used to living like this.
b. It is not school.

c. And we are not buying your daughter anything.
d. He really isn't that far off track.
e. Them cold fries, they aren't even hot when you get them.

Contracted copula

f. But I'm not finished talking yet.
g. Mine's not next to the shower.
h. So you're not going out front.

Not

i. No, she not losing her teeth.
j. You not hot.

Ain't

k. I ain't worried 'bout the coat now.
l. Long as it ain't no BeBe's kid.
m. They ain't 'posed to know we taping.

Among the non-copular constructions, there are four distinct variables. In present tense non-copular constructions with base form predicates (Vbse), there is variation between the forms *don't* and *doesn't* in the environment of third-person singular subjects. These will be called variants of the variable (NEG PRES).

(5) a. The tape recorder don't pick that up.
b. He talks, but he doesn't talk- he don- he doesn't talk as well.

For present tense non-copular constructions with non-third-person singular subjects and base form predicates, the form *don't* is used near-categorically. In this environment, there are 259 tokens of *don't*, 4 tokens of *do not*, and 1 token of *doesn't* (shown in (6f)).

(6) a. I don't like this kind of bologna.
b. You don't even hear CrisCros on the radio no more.
c. And we don't lock our doors.
d. Guns don't scare me.
e. Cats do not spray.
f. The people probably doesn't even have (?).

Another pattern of variation found among present tense non-copular constructions involves the forms *ain't* and *don't*, which combine with the predicates *got* or *gotta*. This variable is referred to as (NEG GOT(TA)).

(7) a. He ain't even got a crease in his face.
b. He don't got one crease.
c. You ain't gotta eat it.
d. You don't gotta be- um- up to the mike.

Non-copular constructions in which there is a present perfect interpretation exhibit variation among the forms *ain't*, *haven't*, and *hasn't*, which

TABLE 1. *Neg forms in predicative declarative constructions in AAVE*

	Variables	NEG Forms	Predicates
Copular			
Present tense	(NEG COP)	*am not, is not, are not, isn't, aren't, 'm not, 're not, 's not, not, ain't*	NP, AdjP, Loc, Ving, Gon(na)
Past tense	—	*wasn't*	NP, AdjP, Loc, Ving, Gon(na)
Non-copular			
Present tense	(NEG PRES)[a]	*don't, doesn't*	Vbse
	—[b]	*don't*	Vbse
	(NEG GOT(ta))	*ain't, don't*	Got(ta)
Past tense	(NEG PAST)	*ain't, didn't*	Vbse
Present perfect	(NEG PERF)	*ain't, haven't, hasn't*	Vpp

[a]With third singular subjects.
[b]With non-third singular subjects.

combine with past participial predicates (Vpp). These are called variants of (NEG PERF).[5]

(8) a. He ain't started my grill yet.
b. I haven't had that car six months.
c. He hasn't pooped here.

Finally, in past tense non-copular constructions there is one variable: (NEG PAST). This variable consists of the variants *ain't* and *didn't*, which combine with base form predicates.

(9) a. I ain't give you none, Boo, did I?
b. And Mike Tyson didn't rape that girl. I'm down with Mike. He ain't rape that girl.

These findings are all summarized in Table 1.

As these variables are discussed, special consideration is given to the functions and distributions of *ain't*. As shown in Table 1, *ain't* plays a prominent role in this system of negation, varying with several different negative auxiliaries in a number of different functions. Two main hypotheses have been proposed to account for the synchronic status of *ain't* in AAVE:

Hypothesis 1: *Ain't* represents negative forms of the auxiliaries *be*, *have*, and *do*.
Hypothesis 2: *Ain't* represents a tense-aspect neutral negative auxiliary.

Under the first hypothesis, *ain't* is said to represent surface alternations of the forms with which it varies—present negated forms of *be* and *have* and past negated forms of *do*. This hypothesis has been supported primarily by

TABLE 2. *Negative auxiliary* eh *in Trinidadian Creole (TC)*

Environments	TC	SE
NP_____Adj.	a. The man eh sick.	a. The man isn't sick.
NP_____Adv.	b. The man eh here.	b. The man isn't here.
NP_____Prep. phrase	c. The man eh with us.	c. The man isn't with us.
NP_____NP	d. The man eh a thief.	d. The man isn't a thief.
NP_____Ving	e. The girl eh crying.	e. The girl isn't crying.
NP_____Vstate	f. The girl eh know.	f. The girl doesn't know.
NP_____Vnonstate	g. The girl eh lie.	g. The girl didn't lie.

Source: Winford (1983:203).

researchers who argue that the variation in AAVE belongs to one underlying system (see Labov, 1972a). Based on this hypothesis, *ain't* in AAVE is said to behave similarly to *ain't* in other nonstandard varieties of English. Some scholars have argued that this cannot be the case, however, given the use of *ain't* in past contexts.

> . . . unlike the *ain't* of [mainstream American English], which is a present tense form, AAVE *ain't* is tense/aspect neutral, and AAVE sentences derive their tense/aspect interpretation from the stativity of the predicate. (Debose, 1994:128)

> It is tempting to interpret *ain't* the same way as in other nonstandard varieties of English, especially because of its usage with nonverbal and participial predicates . . . However, this analysis is precluded by its combination with nonparticipial verbs . . . which is not attested or common in other nonstandard varieties. (Mufwene, in press)

Debose (1994) supported the second hypothesis—that *ain't* represents a tense-aspect neutral negative auxiliary—based on his observations of the use of *ain't* in past contexts. Under this hypothesis, AAVE *ain't* is said to resemble the tense-aspect neutral negative auxiliaries found in creole varieties, such as *eh* in Trinidadian Creole (see Table 2).[6] Supporters of this hypothesis, including Debose (1994), argue that AAVE is a separate and autonomous system that interacts with SE to produce much of the variation that we observe. The alternations between *ain't* and its variants, therefore, provide us with some important insights into the nature of the variability at work.

METHODOLOGY

The primary objective in collecting the data for this project was to collect samples of vernacular speech.

TABLE 3. *Speaker group statistics*

	Female	Male
Under 20 years	12	28
Over 20 years	14	2
Total	26	30

> Not every style or point on the stylistic continuum is of equal interest to linguists. Some styles show irregular phonological and grammatical patterns, with a great deal of hypercorrection. In other styles, we find more systematic speech, where the fundamental relations which determine the course of linguistic evolution can be seen most clearly. This is the vernacular—the style in which the minimum attention is given to the monitoring of speech. Observation of the vernacular gives us the most systematic data for our analysis of linguistic structure. (Labov, 1972b:208)

With this goal in mind, the data for the project were collected using the social networks approach: a fieldworker records speakers in a pre-existing social group by going through a series of contacts within the group. It is believed that the dynamics of this approach lead to more spontaneous speech than is generally obtainable through interview style techniques, thus making it more probable that the investigator will approach the vernacular in the data that she or he is observing (Milroy, 1980, 1987). To aid in reducing the strains of observation, the primary fieldworker, Tamara Snow, acted as a participant observer by taking part in the conversations that she recorded within her own network of family and friends. An overlapping network was established with Tamara's next door neighbor, Rick Jackson, who also participated in the conversations that he recorded within his own network of family and friends.

As the goal of this investigation was to analyze the linguistic system itself, extralinguistic factors such as age, gender, and socioeconomic status (i.e., education and occupation) were not controlled for, but rather were allowed to be defined through the network. A brief description of these factors, however, will provide a clearer understanding of the source of the data. The two fieldworkers and all of the speakers recorded in the project were members of an upper working-class neighborhood in Columbus, Ohio. Tamara, an African American female, was 21 years of age and a college student when the project was carried out. Rick, an African American male, was 16 and a high school student at the time. In total, 56 speakers were recorded, 24 of whom contributed to the bulk of the conversation; all of the speakers were African American. Table 3 outlines the distribution of these speakers by age and gender.

With the exception of Tamara, the only other speaker in the group to have attended college was one of the two male speakers over 20. This person

attended two years of college, without completing the degree, and was working as a manager in a major car company at the time of the project. The other male speaker over 20 spent some time in the military after completing his high school degree and was employed as an exterminator at the time. Among the female speakers over 20 years of age, all completed their high school degrees except two, both of whom received high school equivalency diplomas (GEDs). Occupations among the members of this group included cashiers, factory and warehouse workers, receptionists, and day care providers. Only one of the women in the group was unemployed at the time of the project. Almost all of the speakers were natives of Columbus, Ohio; 7 speakers, including Tamara, had moved to Columbus from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, within the last 5 to 10 years.

Baugh (1983) in his study of Black street speech, argued that, to obtain the full vernacular, researchers must investigate communities of speakers who live, work, and socialize primarily with and among speakers of their same vernacular. The people we recorded interacted primarily with other AAVE speakers in their home environments. However, most of the speakers in the "over 20" group had some degree of contact with speakers of other dialects in both their school and work environments. The same was true for the speakers under 20 years of age, who came into contact with speakers of other dialects in their elementary, middle, and high schools. It should be noted that, although the findings presented in this study are intended to represent some level of the vernacular, they may not be representative of the most conservative vernacular of African American English.

QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

This analysis, which is based on techniques of quantitative methodology, has two primary goals: (1) to investigate variability in the linguistic code, and (2) to draw conclusions about the structure of the linguistic system(s) based on the findings. To examine the potential effects of internal linguistic constraints on each of the observed variables, I performed variable rule analyses using GOLDVARB, a multiple regression package designed for the Macintosh (Rand & Sankoff, 1990). With the exception of the (NEG PRES) variable, all of the variables in these data involve the form *ain't*. Therefore, the analysis of (NEG PRES) is presented first, followed by the analyses of the variables involving *ain't*.

The (NEG PRES) *variable*

The (NEG PRES) variable is unique in the data in that the choice of its variants relates to the issue of subject–verb concord in AAVE. As shown in Table 4, the non-inflected variant, *don't*, is used with 86% frequency in the data.[7] Previous quantitative analyses of *-s* variability in AAVE have shown that the non-inflected verb is the predominant form in the environment of third-

TABLE 4. *Overall distribution of the* (NEG PRES) *variants*

	%	*N*
don't	86	81
doesn't	14	13
Total	100	94

person singular subjects, with "irregular" verbs such as *do*, *have*, and *say* showing a notably higher percentage of non-inflection in third-person singular environments than "regular" verbs (Fasold, 1972; Labov et al., 1968; Wolfram, 1969).[8] The form *do* is said to stand out even among these irregular verbs in showing more non-inflection in the negative than in the affirmative. There is an 83% ($N = 90$) frequency of *don't* in the New York City data analyzed by Labov et al. (1968:247).[9] And Fasold (1972) reported an 87.5% ($N = 24$) frequency of *don't* in his Washington, DC, data (124). The 86% frequency of *don't* in this data set is thus very much in line with previous findings of *don't* usage in AAVE. The strong preference for *don't* in third-person singular environments, however, is not unique to varieties of AAVE; it has also been found to be characteristic of White nonstandard varieties (WNS) of English. For example, in the Labov et al. (1968) study, White Inwood speakers were reported to use *don't* with 68% ($N = 17$) frequency over *doesn't* in third-person singular environments (247).[10] And this is in contrast to their categorical use of third-person singular inflection with the verbs *have*, *do*, and *say* (247) (see also Feagin, 1979).

Whereas some have attributed the variability in third-person singular inflection in AAVE to a prior creole influence, others have attributed it to contact with earlier stages of WNS varieties of English, for which this variability was also attested. Brainerd (1989) cited the use of third-person singular *don't* in written texts as early as the late 17th century (186, 187); he presumed that this and other contractions of *not* were originally introduced into the language by speakers of nonstandard varieties of English (184). In order to gain a better understanding of what factors influence this variation, with the hope of ultimately resolving the question of how this variation originated in AAVE, researchers have analyzed a number of factors as possible internal linguistic constraints on third-person singular variability. In most cases, phonological factors immediately preceding and following *-s* have not been found significant to this variation (Fasold, 1972:125; Wolfram, 1969:125), although Labov et al. (1968) reported a slight tendency for a following vowel to favor *-s* absence in their data (164). Myhill and Harris (1986) found that third-person singular *-s* inflection occurred almost exclusively in narrative contexts in their Philadelphia data, leading them to the conclusion that third-person singular *-s* functions as a narrative marker in AAVE (30). It has also been found that in conjoined verb phrases there is a tendency for the first verb to receive *-s*

TABLE 5. *Distribution of* don't *by definiteness of the subject and multiple negation*

	%	*N*
Definiteness of the subject		
Definite	85	72
Indefinite	100	9
Multiple negation		
Multiple negative	100	20
Nonmultiple negative	82	61

inflection and for the second to be non-inflected (Fasold, 1972:129; Myhill & Harris, 1986:28). None of these constraints could be considered for the (NEG PRES) variation, however, because there were no competing phonological constraints to consider, and no (NEG PRES) variants were found in narrative contexts or conjoined verb phrases.

Three factors that were previously considered in the literature were tested for their influence on the (NEG PRES) variation.[11] The first factor group, subject type, was tested to determine whether pronoun subjects favor the non-inflected variant over noun phrase subjects. This constraint has been attested in certain British dialects as well as in some Southern WNS varieties of American English (Feagin, 1979; Wakelin, 1977). This constraint is said to find its origins in Old English (Poplack & Tagliamonte, 1989). The second factor group, definiteness of the subject, was tested to determine whether indefinite subjects favor the non-inflected verb form more than definite subjects. Such a finding might suggest a connection between AAVE and creole varieties such as mesolectal Guyanese, in which speakers "are slow to extend third-person-singular *-s* to verbs that have non-definite subjects" (Bickerton, 1975:137). The third factor group, verbal aspect, included the factors habitual and non-habitual aspect. This factor group was tested with regard to the arguments put forward by Bickerton (1975) that third-person singular *-s* functions as a [−punctual] marker in AAVE (136).[12] Although both *don't* and *doesn't* are used in habitual contexts in these data (see note 12), this constraint was tested to determine whether non-habitual contexts favor the non-inflected predicate. Finally, an additional factor group, multiple negation, was tested to determine whether *don't* in third-person singular environments is used more frequently with multiple negative constructions, which might point to some type of stylistic conditioning on the variation. This factor group included two factors: multiple negative and nonmultiple negative.

Before the variable rule analysis was performed, two of the factor groups—definiteness of the subject and multiple negation—were eliminated as singletons. Note in Table 5 that the categorical use of *don't* with indefinite subjects and in multiple negative constructions supports the hypothesis that these envi-

TABLE 6. *Percentages and probabilities of* don't *in* (NEG PRES) *environments*

	%	*N*	Weights
Verbal aspect*			
Habitual	90	18	.90
Non-habitual	85	63	.86
Subject type*			
Pronoun	84	64	.84
Noun phrase	94	17	.94
Input probability = 0.870			
Total chi-square = 4.4296			
Chi-square/cell = 1.1074			

*Not significant.

ronments favor the non-inflected form. After the singleton groups were eliminated, the remaining two factor groups were tested as constraints on the (NEG PRES) variation. As shown in Table 6, neither verbal aspect nor subject type was selected by the program as significant to the distribution of *don't* in (NEG PRES) environments. The percentages for each factor group actually lean in the opposite direction from what was expected: *don't* (the non-inflected variant) was favored more by habitual contexts and noun phrase subjects. However, the differences between the factor weights in each of these groups are so small that no significance can be placed on these patterns.

Although the verbal aspect group was not significant to this variation, the categorical use of third-person singular *don't* in the environment of indefinite subjects (as found in mesolectal Guyanese) supports the possibility of a creole influence on the (NEG PRES) variation. It should be noted, however, that the use of non-inflected verbs with indefinite subjects has also been cited as typical of older varieties of English, which may also have contributed to the AAVE pattern. If we look at the results for subject type, however, it does not appear that the (NEG PRES) variation is in any way correlated with the NP/Pronoun distinction, as has been found to be true of early and modern British dialects as well as modern WNS varieties.[13] These results thus do not allow us to draw any conclusions about the diachronic development of this variation in AAVE.

In regards to the synchronic variation, however, it seems reasonable to conclude that *don't* is the vernacular norm in these data, as evidenced by its high frequency of usage in third-person singular environments. The categorical use of third-person singular *don't* in multiple negative constructions supports this notion, suggesting that the non-inflected variant is characteristic of the vernacular style. By contrast, the form *doesn't* seems to be marginally incorporated into AAVE, given its infrequent use in the data. These findings

TABLE 7. *Frequencies of* ain't

Variable	Predicate	%	*N*
(NEG COP)	NP, AdjP, Loc, Ving, Gon(na)	63	154
(NEG PERF)	Vpp	71	29
(NEG PAST)	Vbse	38	62
(NEG GOT(TA))	Got(ta)	65	41
Overall frequency of *ain't*: 286/420 (68%)			

thus correspond to those of previous studies of *-s* variability in AAVE, in which it is concluded that "the normal form of the present negative is *don't*, not *doesn't*" (Labov et al., 1968:255).

Variables involving ain't

The form *ain't* functions as a variant in four distinct variables in these data. Table 7 lists the frequencies of *ain't* for each of the grammatical environments in which it is found. In total, *ain't* represents 68% of the tokens found in (NEG COP), (NEG PERF), (NEG PAST), and (NEG GOT(TA)) environments. Its behavior in each variable environment is discussed in the sections to follow.

COPULAR CONSTRUCTIONS

The (NEG COP) *variable*

One of the most frequently examined features of the AAVE grammar is copular variability (Bailey & Maynor, 1987; Baugh, 1980; Holm, 1984; Labov, 1969; Labov et al., 1968; Poplack & Sankoff, 1987; Rickford, Ball, Blake, Jackson, & Martin, 1991; Winford, 1992). Previous studies have shown that non-finite and past tense forms of *be*, as well as emphatic and exposed *be*, invariably appear in full form, whereas certain present tense forms of the AAVE copula alternate among full, contracted, and zero realizations. These alternations have led to debates over the structure of the AAVE copula system, particularly as it relates to copula systems of Caribbean English Creoles and dialects of American English.

> The question is whether [full and contracted forms of the copula] are the result of variable morphological insertion of forms from a superposed dialect, or whether [contracted and zero forms of the copula] are the result of the variable reduction of an underlying form . . . Following [the first] idea, BEV would be closer to the post-Creole continuum in Jamaica than other English dialects. The second solution would show BEV as a dialect that differs from others by an additional rule of auxiliary deletion. (Labov, 1982:179)

TABLE 8. *Overall distribution of the* (NEG COP) *variants*

	%	*N*
Full *be* + *n(o)t*	5	13
Contracted *be* + *not*	27	66
not	5	13
ain't	63	154
Total	100	246

Most studies of AAVE copular variability have focused on affirmative constructions, overlooking the significance of negative copular constructions for the question of the underlying grammar. Bailey and Maynor (1987), for example, excluded *ain't* from their quantitative analysis of copular absence, treating it as a "single negating morpheme" (453). And Rickford et al. (1991) excluded all negatives from their analysis because of their indeterminate status in the overall copula system (129). The present analysis will thus provide some sense of what the patterns of variability are in negative copular constructions and what implications this variability holds for the AAVE grammar.

The (NEG COP) variable consists of the negative full copula variant, the negative contracted copula variant, the variant *not*, and the variant *ain't*. As Table 8 shows, the most frequently used variant for (NEG COP) is *ain't*, which occurs with 63% frequency in the data. Tokens of the negative contracted copula are the next most frequent, occurring in 27% of all possible cases. And there is an equal number of *not* and negative full copula tokens in the data, each occurring with only 5% frequency. Three explanations are considered as possible ways of analyzing this variation. Two are concurrent with the view that AAVE is an autonomous system that variably accepts superposed forms from SE (i.e., the bisystemic account). The third option is concurrent with the view that AAVE shares the same underlying system as SE, but with additional rules not found in other English varieties (i.e., the monosystemic account).

Bisystemic Account

Option 1: The copula, which is part of the SE system, is variably incorporated into AAVE and negated by *not*. The forms *not* and *ain't* belong to the AAVE system and function as tense-aspect neutral negative auxiliaries that negate zero-copula constructions.

Option 2: The copula, which is part of the SE system, is variably incorporated into AAVE and negated by *not*. The form *not* represents negation of the deleted copula. The form *ain't* belongs to the AAVE system and functions as a tense-aspect neutral negative auxiliary that negates zero-copula constructions.

Monosystemic Account

Option 3: The copula, which belongs to the underlying AAVE system, is negated by *not* and undergoes variable contraction and deletion. The form *not* represents negation of the deleted copula, and *ain't* represents an invariant negative copular auxiliary—an alternative realization of *be* + *not*.

These three options are schematically represented in Figure 1.

Before a quantitative analysis of the negative copular constructions could be done, it was necessary to make a couple of important decisions about how to count the (NEG COP) tokens. One issue involved the question of whether to treat the tokens in *am*, *is*, and *are* environments under a single variable or to separate them. In most studies of affirmative copular variability, sentences containing first-person singular subjects and *it/that/what* subjects are excluded from the analysis because of the categorical appearance of the copula (usually in contracted form) in these environments (e.g., *I'm a doctor* vs. **I a doctor*; *It's three o'clock* vs. **It three o'clock*). In addition, the observation of a notably higher percentage of copular absence in *are* environments than in *is* environments has led researchers to differ in their treatments of *is* and *are* as one variable (Wolfram, 1969) or as two (Baugh, 1979; Wolfram, 1974).[14] In the negative data, however, the fact that *ain't* varies with negative auxiliaries in *am*, *is*, and *are* environments seems to necessitate an analysis of the tokens in all three environments under one variable. Any differences in the behavior of the negative forms in these environments were thus captured by way of a person–number factor group, as done in Rickford et al. (1991) for their analysis of *is* and *are* in affirmative constructions.

A second issue that had to be addressed was the way the tokens were to be tabulated. Previous studies have differed in their methods of tabulation and, consequently, have yielded different results. Labov (1969) and Baugh (1980), for example, employed formulae that counted deletions as a subset of contractions. Romaine (1982), on the other hand, proposed that deletions be ordered before contractions, and that contractions then be counted out of the remaining full and contracted forms. Rickford et al. (1991) and Winford (1992) employed "straight contraction and deletion," which involved counting tokens of contraction and copular absence each as a percentage of all possible outcomes. These methods of copular tabulation are represented in Rickford et al. (1991:106,107,124) by the following formulae.[15] (Note that "Romaine deletion" and "straight deletion" employ identical formulae, and that the formulae proposed by Rickford et al. to account for the "creolist" hypothesis of morphological insertion and subsequent contraction are identical to the formulae for "Labov contraction" and "Romaine contraction," respectively.)

Methods of calculating "contraction" and "deletion" of the copula (C = contracted copula, D = deleted copula, F = full copula)

Labov contraction/Morphological insertion $\frac{C + D}{F + C + D}$

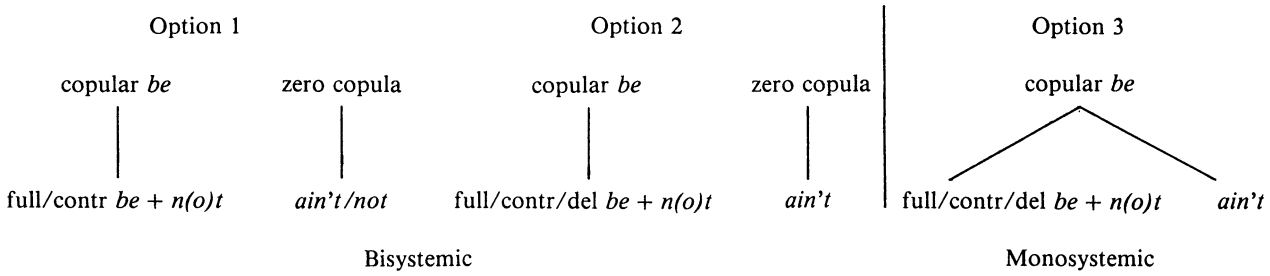

FIGURE 1. Bisystemic vs. monosystemic accounts of (NEG COP).

Labov deletion $\frac{D}{C + D}$

Romaine contraction $\frac{C}{F + C}$

Straight contraction $\frac{C}{F + C + D}$

Straight/Romaine deletion $\frac{D}{F + C + D}$

For the negative copular constructions, it would be impossible to employ any of the first three methods without imposing some preconceived notions on the underlying copular system and the status of *ain't* in these environments. For this reason, the tokens for each (NEG COP) variant were counted as a percentage of all possible forms in any given environment, that is, in a manner analogous to Rickford et al.'s straight contraction and deletion.

Table 9 lists the VARBRUL weightings presented in Rickford et al. (1991) for straight contraction and deletion of *is* and *are* in affirmative constructions.[16] To get a better sense of the distribution of the (NEG COP) variants and to see how their distributions relate to the affirmative patterns, I encoded the (NEG COP) variants for the four independent factor groups shown in Table 9, with some slight modifications made to accommodate for the negative data. Added to the subject group were *it/that/what* subjects, which were counted as a distinct factor because of the strong tendency for the copula to appear in contracted form in these environments. As in Table 9, noun phrase subjects were separated from pronominal subjects to determine whether contraction and copular absence are favored by the latter. In addition, I followed Rickford et al. (1991) in introducing a distinction between the personal pronouns *he*, *she*, *we*, *you*, and *they* and other pronouns such as *these* and *those*, based on the observation that these personal pronouns all end in vowel sounds (which have also been found to favor copula absence). In order to gain a sense of the independent effects of the preceding phonological environment, I also considered the influence of preceding consonants and preceding vowels.[17] To determine whether the (NEG COP) alternation was grammatically conditioned in any way, I considered the following grammatical environment, with the five factors _____NP, _____AdjP, _____Loc, _____Ving, and _____Gon(na). This factor group is especially relevant to the question of a creole influence on the AAVE grammar, as it has been argued that a higher percentage of copular absence in the auxiliary environments Ving and Gon(na) than in the traditional copular environments NP, AdjP, and Loc would resemble patterns of copular absence found in many of the Caribbean Creoles (see B. Bailey, 1965; Baugh, 1980; Poplack & Sankoff, 1987; Rickford & Blake, 1990; Winford, 1992). Finally, I considered the factor group person–number, with plural/second-person singular and third-person singular subjects, as well as first-person singular subjects, to capture any differences in the distribution of the variants in terms of person–number. Table 10

TABLE 9. *VARBRUL weightings for straight contraction and deletion of* is *and* are *in affirmative constructions*

	Straight Contraction	Straight Deletion
Preceding phonological env.**		
Consonant	.36	.47
Vowel	.64	.53
Following grammatical env.		
NP	.61	.27
AdjP	.52	.45
Loc	.58	.47
Ving	.41	.67
Gon(na)	.33	.83
Subject		
Personal pronoun	.62	.62
Other pronoun	.51	.46
Noun phrase	.37	.42
Person-number		
Plural/2nd singular	.36	.64
3rd singular	.64	.36
Overall percentage	26	53
Total number of tokens	1,424	1,424
Input probability	.19	.35

**Factor groups not selected as significant in the deletion run. All factor groups were chosen as significant in the contraction run.
Source: Rickford et al. (1991:114, Table 5; 117, Table 6).

lists the results of three separate VARBRUL runs testing the significance of these factor groups on the distribution of *ain't*, the negative contracted copula, and *not*.

As indicated by the single asterisk markings, none of the factor groups were selected as significant to the distribution of *ain't* in (NEG COP) environments. There is a slightly higher preference for *ain't* in the environment of a preceding vowel (first group), the predicate *gon(na)* (second group), or a noun phrase subject (third group). However, the relative differences between the factor weights in these groups are not significant. In the person-number group, *ain't* appears to be distributed fairly evenly among the three factors, with slightly less preference for *ain't* in third-person singular environments. It appears, therefore, that *ain't* is insensitive to person-number distinctions in copular environments.

For the negative contracted copula, subject and person-number were selected as significant, but preceding phonological environment and following grammatical environment were not (as shown by the double asterisk marking). For the subject group, the negative contracted copula is favored by *it/that/what* subjects and personal pronoun subjects. These findings correspond to affirmative patterns, where *it/that/what* subjects show categorical

TABLE 10. *Percentages and probabilities of* ain't, *the contracted copula, and* not

	ain't			Contracted Copula			*not*		
	%	*N*	Weight	%	*N*	Weight	%	*N*	Weight
Preceding phonological env.*/**									
Consonant	56	50	.50	34	31	.30	67	4	.83
Vowel	67	104	.71	22	35	.17	12	9	.07
Following grammatical env.*/**/***									
NP[a]	56	20	.60	33	12	.20	0	0	0
AdjP	55	45	.56	32	26	.24	22	5	.12
Loc	60	6	.61	30	3	.34	14	1	.09
Ving	63	39	.60	23	14	.23	25	6	.17
Gon(na)	79	44	.79	20	11	.16	4	1	.04
Subject*/***									
Personal pronoun	65	95	.53	24	36	.33	14	10	.10
Other pronoun	60	6	.74	10	1	.06	50	3	.03
Noun phrase[a]	77	23	.85	3	1	.02	0	0	0
It/That/What[a]	51	30	.73	47	28	.24	0	0	0
Person-number*									
1st singular[a]	68	48	.69	28	20	.23	0	0	0
Plural/2nd singular	66	40	.67	10	6	.08	24	12	.19
3rd singular	58	66	.58	35	40	.32	4	1	.02
Input probability			.637			.214			.093
Total chi-square			31.1213			39.0781			4.4583
Chi-square/cell			.8190			1.0284			0.3185

[a]Knockout factors in the run for *not*.
*Factor groups not selected as significant in the run for *ain't*.
**Factor groups not selected as significant in the run for the negative contracted copula.
***Factor groups not selected as significant in the run for *not*.

contraction and personal pronouns strongly favor contraction (see Table 9). And the fact that preceding phonological environment is not significant to the distribution of the contracted copula shows that the personal pronoun effect is independent of the influence of a preceding vowel. The figures for person-number show that *is* and *am* environments favor contraction much more than *are* environments. These findings also support affirmative results, where *am* tokens are near-categorically contracted and *is* environments favor contraction (as shown in Table 9). Where the negative results differ noticeably from affirmative findings is with the following grammatical environment group. Note that the patterning of the factor weights for the negative contracted copula does not at all resemble the hierarchy found in the affirmative data (see Table 9), where contraction is most favored by NPs and least favored by Gon(na).[18] I return to the significance of these findings following the discussion of *not*.

The first attempt at a VARBRUL run for the *not* variant produced knockouts in the environments of *it/that/what* subjects, noun phrase subjects, first-person singular subjects, and noun phrase predicates. The absence of *not*

tokens in the environment of first-person singular and *it/that/what* subjects corresponds to the categorical presence of the copula in these environments in the affirmative. And although studies of affirmative constructions have not reported categorical presence of the copula with NP subjects and NP predicates, these environments have been reported to strongly favor the copula (Bailey & Schnebly, 1988; Baugh, 1980; Labov, 1972a; Poplack & Sankoff, 1987; Rickford et al., 1991: Table 9). The absence of *not* in these four environments is thus a predictable result if we assume a connection between *not* in negative constructions and copular absence in affirmative constructions.

In order to perform a VARBRUL analysis for *not*, it was necessary to eliminate these four knockout factors, causing the total number of (NEG COP) tokens to drop to 79 for this run. Two factor groups, preceding phonological environment and person–number, were selected as significant to the appearance of *not*, whereas the following grammatical environment and subject groups were not (as indicated by the triple asterisk marking in Table 10). For preceding phonological environment, a preceding consonant favors the appearance of *not*, whereas a preceding vowel disfavors it. This is actually the opposite of the pattern reported for affirmative constructions, where vowels favor copular absence over consonants. The person–number results, however, are more in line with the affirmative findings if we maintain that there is a relationship between *not* and copular absence. Note that *are* environments favor the appearance of *not*, whereas *is* environments disfavor it (cf. Table 9). Although the subject group was not chosen as significant, the relative ordering of the factor weights shows a slight tendency for personal pronouns to favor *not*, as in the affirmative data for copular absence. The ordering of the factor weights for following grammatical environment, however, is not at all similar to the affirmative hierarchy.[19]

Given the small number of tokens involved in these runs, particularly for the contracted copula and *not*, it is difficult to draw any definitive conclusions from the statistical results about which of the three options stated earlier best accounts for the (NEG COP) variability. However, there are a few interesting patterns that might point us in the right direction. As noted earlier, the distribution of *not* resembles in many ways the patterns of copular absence found in affirmative constructions. The phonological conditioning of *not*, along with the strong clustering of *not* tokens in the environment of plural and second-person singular subjects (i.e., *are* environments), suggests that this variant represents negation of the deleted copula rather than a simple negator of zero-copula constructions.[20] This would eliminate the possibility of Option 1 being an accurate analysis. In first- and third-person singular environments, we note that the copula is frequently contracted, but rarely or never deleted. And the following grammatical environments fail to show any sign of the copula being morphologically incorporated into the AAVE grammar in any way similar to the creole hierarchy (where copula absence is systematically higher in auxiliary environments than in traditional copular environments). These facts suggest that the copula is actually present in

the underlying grammar, as stated in Option 3. For *ain't*, the statistical results reveal very little, except to show that *ain't* is insensitive to the internal linguistic constraints tested. The use of *ain't* in interrogative constructions, however, provides us with a clearer sense of its functions. In *yes–no* interrogatives and tags, the form *ain't* varies with the auxiliaries *isn't* and *aren't*, but never with bare *not*.[21]

(10) Ain't that little boy cute? (cf. *Not that little boy cute?)
(11) Isn't that the way it goes?
(12) I mean aren't those the ones that people get?
(13) That stuff is still in the refrigerator, ain't it? (cf. *That stuff is still in the refrigerator, not it?)
(14) That's kind of hard though, isn't it?

The fact that *ain't* can be used in these constructions and that bare *not* cannot suggests that *ain't* is not a tense-aspect neutral negative auxiliary, as proposed by the bisystemic account (Options 1 and 2), but is instead a finite auxiliary.[22] Sentences such as (13), in which the *ain't* tag corresponds to a main clause copular auxiliary, indicates that speakers interpret *ain't* as a form of the copula in these environments. Note that no non-copular auxiliaries can be substituted for *ain't* in these constructions.[23]

(15) That stuff is still in the refrigerator, *hasn't it?/*don't it?

Given all of these facts, it seems likely that the copula is underlyingly present in AAVE, as proposed by Option 3. The alternations between *ain't* and forms of *be* + *not* thus seem to involve interaction between an invariant negative copular auxiliary and forms of the negated copula that inflect for person–number distinctions and variably contract and delete, based on factors such as preceding phonological environment and subject type.

NON-COPULAR CONSTRUCTIONS

The (NEG perf) *variable*

The category "perfect" is defined as one that conveys the sense of "some state at S [the moment of speaking] consisting in the experience of past events" (Fenn, 1987:136). In these data, the form *ain't* and forms of *have* + *not* combine with past participial predicates in present perfect constructions. Note that in Table 11 the preferred variant in (NEG perf) environments is *ain't*, which occurs with 71% frequency in the data. This *ain't* may represent "the negative of *have*" (as proposed by Labov et al., 1968:255), or it may be a "tense-aspect neutral negation marker" (as proposed by Debose, 1994:129, for *ain't* in past contexts).

TABLE 11. *Overall distribution of the* (NEG perf) *variants*

	%	*N*
ain't	71	29
have + not	29	12
Total	100	41

TABLE 12. *Percentages and probabilities of* ain't *in* (NEG perf) *environments*

	%	*N*	Weight
Person-number*			
3rd singular	75	6	.83
Non-3rd singular	70	23	.78
Stativity*			
Stative	70	19	.74
Non-stative	71	10	.86
Multiple negation			
Multiple negative	94	17	.95
Nonmultiple negative	52	12	.49
Input probability = .789			
Total chi-square = .0842			
Chi-square/cell = .0140			

*Not significant.

To get a better sense of the distribution of *ain't* in (NEG perf) environments, I considered the potential effects of three factor groups: multiple negation, person-number, and stativity. The results of this run are shown in Table 12. The only factor group chosen as significant in this run was multiple negation. This factor group was tested to determine whether the use of *ain't* in present perfect contexts is in any way conditioned by multiple negation, as predicted by Wolfram (1973) for *ain't* in Puerto Rican English (PRE). Although Wolfram provided no quantitative evidence to support his argument, he predicted that multiple negative constructions would favor the use of *ain't* over *have + not* in present perfect contexts (157). As the results in Table 12 show, this is exactly the pattern that emerges in the AAVE data, with the form *ain't* used near-categorically in multiple negative constructions, while showing just under a .50 probability of occurrence in nonmultiple negative constructions. This evidence suggests that the (NEG perf) variation is stylistically constrained such that *ain't* is more appropriate for contexts in which multiple negation is appropriate.

The second factor group considered was stativity of the predicate. To my knowledge, the stative/non-stative distinction has not been said to be relevant specifically to the variation between *ain't* and *have + not* in AAVE. However, both Debose (1994) and Mufwene (in press) argued that this distinction is crucial to the tense–aspect interpretations of *ain't* in AAVE. According to Mufwene (in press), "*ain't(t)* combines with both verbal and nonverbal predicates, though it is interpreted differently depending on whether the predicate it modifies is stative or nonstative." Mufwene argued that with stative predicates present time reference is preferred, whereas non-stative predicates yield a past time reference interpretation.[24] In Debose's discussion of the use of *ain't* in past contexts, he argued that "syntactic predicates are interpreted as incompletive or completive in aspect, depending on their classification as grammatically stative or non-stative" (1994:129). According to Debose (1994), these distinctions help to draw a connection between AAVE and creole languages, "insofar as [AAVE] presupposes a tense–mood–aspect system which is similar to English Creoles in making a fundamental aspectual distinction between completive and noncompletive aspect, and between stative and nonstative predicates" (130). Because *ain't* in (NEG perf) environments selects both stative and non-stative predicates, the stativity factor group was tested to determine whether the distinction between these two predicates had any significant effect on the *ain't* versus *have + not* alternation. As the results in Table 12 show, however, *ain't* is used with nearly the same frequency in both environments, suggesting that *ain't* in perfect contexts is not sensitive to distinctions in stativity.

The third factor group, person–number, was tested to determine whether the distinction between third-person singular and non-third-person singular environments had any significant effect on the (NEG perf) alternation. Recall from the discussion on the (NEG COP) variation that person–number distinctions were significant to the appearance of contracted and deleted forms of *be + not*, though they had no significant effect on the appearance of *ain't*. As Table 12 shows, person–number distinctions also have no significant effect on the appearance of *ain't* in perfect contexts.[25]

Although these VARBRUL results provide us with a better understanding of the distribution of the (NEG perf) variants, they fail to provide us with any conclusive evidence on the status of *ain't* in perfect contexts. Unfortunately, the data also lack any examples of *ain't* in interrogative constructions that might be used as evidence for or against the analysis of *ain't* as the negative of *have*. However, the subcategorization properties of *ain't* in present perfect constructions are of interest here. Note that the predicates selected by *ain't* in (NEG perf) constructions are identical to the past participial verb forms selected by *have + not* in SE.

(16) He ain't started my grill yet.
'He hasn't started my grill yet.'

(17) I ain't never seen Jack run that fast.
'I haven't ever seen Jack run that fast.'
(18) He ain't even come home yet.
'He hasn't even come home yet.'

This use of *ain't* may be contrasted with the use of creole tense-aspect neutral negative auxiliaries, which typically select base form predicates and capture their aspectual interpretation through the context, as seen in the Trinidadian English examples in (19)–(21), from Winford (1993).

(19) I ain't move no place, up to now. Still here, around twenty-seven years now. (166)
(20) It [the village] ain't mix up with outside yet. (171)
'It hasn't come into contact with the outside world yet.'
(21) I ain't know how A. ain't tell you yet. (171)

The fact that *ain't* in AAVE selects the same types of predicates selected by *have* + *not* in present perfect contexts supports the theory that *ain't* functions as the negative of *have* in these environments.[26]

In addition to sharing the same subcategorization properties, *ain't* and forms of *have* + *not* collocate with the same types of adverbials in perfect contexts (i.e., those that convey the sense of continuity with the moment of speaking, but with a starting point prior to that moment).

(22) I haven't never been there.
(23) I ain't never seen neither one of them.

This supports the notion that *ain't* and *have* + *not* share the same semantic function in these environments. What is interesting to note here is that, although the *have* + *not* forms do not always require the adverbial specification to support their perfect interpretation, the form *ain't* is almost always accompanied by some sort of "perfect" adverbial in these contexts. This may be analyzed as a mechanism used by AAVE speakers to disambiguate between preterite and present perfect interpretations when there is a base form predicate, as in sentences (24) and (25).[27]

(24) She ain't come home yet.
'She hasn't come home yet.'
(25) She ain't come home yesterday.
'She didn't come home yesterday.'

So although *ain't* may represent a perfect auxiliary, as suggested by its subcategorization properties, the invariance of its shape seems to necessitate the use of adverbials to support its perfect interpretation, unlike the *have* + *not* variant, which can stand alone.[28]

TABLE 13. *Overall distribution of the* (NEG GOT(TA)) *variants*

	%	*N*
ain't	65	41
don't	35	22
Total	100	63

But before we can come to any conclusions about the status of *ain't* as a variant of *have* + *not*, we must first establish whether *have* is actually present in the underlying grammar. This issue has been subject to an adequate amount of debate, given the infrequent and irregular use of *have* in affirmative constructions (Fasold & Wolfram, 1970:61; Labov, 1972a:53; Labov et al., 1968:254). According to Labov et al. (1968), *have* is underlyingly present in AAVE, but shows up infrequently in the grammar because of the same processes of phonological reduction, contraction, and deletion that affect the copula.

> We do not believe that the occurrences of *have* represent importation from SE: the lames who frequently do show diluted NNE [nonstandard Negro English] grammar do not show any more *have* than anyone else. It seems clear that most of the occurrences of *have* . . . are deleted by a phonological process similar to those we have discussed above [for the copula]. The full forms which are not contracted of course, survive; but contraction leaves a lone [v], which is subject to deletion . . . (223–225)

On the other hand, researchers such as Loflin (1970) and Fickett (1970) have argued that the infrequent and irregular use of *have* in AAVE is evidence that it is not part of the underlying grammar. Dillard (1972) supported this claim as well, arguing that AAVE speakers employ *have* + *en* constructions "with a lack of skill which shows that they are really borrowing them from Standard English and not using the resources of their own language" (48). Thus, while it appears that *ain't* functions as the negative of *have* in these data, a quantitative analysis of affirmative perfect constructions is needed to determine whether *have* is actually present in the underlying grammar of AAVE before any definite conclusions can be made concerning the status of *ain't*.

The (NEG GOT(TA)) *variable*

In addition to the use of *ain't* in present copular and present perfect constructions, there is a very restricted pattern of variation in present contexts between *ain't* and *don't* in the negation of *got* meaning 'to have' and *gotta* meaning 'to be required to'. In Table 13, we see that *ain't* is the preferred variant in (NEG GOT(TA)) environments, occurring with 65% frequency in the data. The variation between *ain't* and *don't* in these environments may be attributed to

the ambiguity of *got* in AAVE as a participle that combines with *ain't* (cf. (NEG perf)) and as a main verb that combines with *don't* (cf. (NEG pres)).[29,30] Berdan (1977) noted:

> The speaker who utters [the sentence *My friends ~~have~~ got a new car*], using a grammar where *have*-deletion operates, will be comprehended perfectly by a hearer whose grammar only has *got* as a regular main verb, giving . . . *My friends ~~do~~ got a new car*. This would be the case where the grammars are different, but comprehension exists. (14)

With the (NEG got(ta)) variation, it appears that this ambiguity exists within the AAVE grammar itself. To determine whether *got* is ambiguous between a predicate and a main verb in AAVE, I searched the data for alternations among *ain't*, *don't*, and *haven't* in tag constructions (e.g., *They got money, don't they?/ain't they?/haven't they?*). The tags in these data showed categorical use of *don't*.[31] However, a few random elicitations from AAVE speakers suggested that all three tags are possible, although their use may be stylistically constrained (see note 29).

There were also three sentences in the data that represented a similar alternation between *ain't* and *don't* before *supposed to*. This variation also included the variant *not*.

(26) We don't supposed to know you taping, do we?
(27) They ain't supposed to know we taping.
(28) Y'all not supposed to go up them steps, are you?

Although *ain't* in sentence (27) functions as a copular auxiliary rather than a perfect auxiliary, the same kind of ambiguity seems to exist here, with *supposed to* functioning both as a main verb negated by *don't* and as an adjectival predicate negated by *ain't* or *not* (cf. (NEG cop)).[32] Fasold and Wolfram (1970) supported this analysis, commenting on a similar use of *don't* in their data.

> Teachers are sometimes doubly surprised when they hear sentences like *He don't suppose to bring his books to class* . . . the presence of *don't* instead of a form of *to be* is strikingly different from standard English. In Negro dialect, the word is not the participle *supposed*, but is a verb *suppose* which functions grammatically like the verb *intend*. (84)

Because it is not clear at this stage what constraints might condition the *ain't/don't* alternation, no VARBRUL analysis was performed on the (NEG got(ta)) variable.

The (NEG past) *variable*

Finally, in addition to its use in present contexts (i.e., in (NEG cop), (NEG perf), and (NEG got(ta)) environments), the form *ain't* is used in past contexts,

TABLE 14. *Overall distribution of the* (NEG past) *variants*

	%	*N*
didn't	62	100
ain't	38	62
Total	100	162

where it varies with *didn't* in the environment of base form predicates. Evidence that *ain't* functions equivalently to *didn't* in these environments is provided by contextual clues such as the types of adverbials that accompany it. Adverbials that collocate with the past tense are described as follows:

> These are adverbs which are marked for noncontiguity with S [where S represents the moment of speaking]. They are also marked either by virtue of their own deictic semantics (yesterday, last week, four minutes ago) or by context (at that time, on this occasion, on June 5th, etc.) when the context indicates that the time-referents so named are prior to S. (Fenn, 1987:210)

The following sentences illustrate the use of *ain't* with these types of adverbials:

(29) I ain't believe you that day, man.
(30) That day when he came in here, he had them both on him and ain't do shit.

However, such adverbials are not essential to the past tense interpretation of *ain't*.

(31) Why did you get tennis shoes and he ain't get none?
(32) And Mike Tyson didn't rape that girl. I'm down with Mike. He ain't rape that girl.

Table 14 lists the distribution of the (NEG past) variants.[33] This alternation is of particular importance to the study of AAVE because of the fact that it has not been reported as productive in SE or any of the WNS varieties. Studies of negation in Reading and Appalachian English, for example, report that no such correspondence exists in these varieties (Cheshire, 1981:366; Wolfram & Christian, 1976:116). Feagin (1979) reported three occurrences of *ain't* in past tense contexts in Alabama English. One she stated could be explained as an *ain't/haven't* correspondence, "with the [-d] [of the past participle] either deleted or assimilated into the following [d]" (215), as in her example, given here as sentence (33).

(33) I ain't notice that.

The other two she said could not be explained (her examples as sentences (34) and (35)).

(34) I ain't go huntin but four or five times.
(35) Well, my stepson is my brother-in-law. That knock you down, ain't it!

Such a small number of tokens, however, suggests that these occurrences are not productive in the system of negation in Alabama English, but are instead idiosyncratic. Similarly, Wolfram (1973) reported that, in his study of Puerto Rican English (PRE), the *ain't/didn't* correspondence was found in only 5% of all of the data collected (157). These constructions were produced by only 6 speakers, 4 of whom claim to have had much contact with speakers of AAVE (158). Wolfram concluded, based on this evidence, that the *ain't/didn't* alternation is not productive in PRE, but rather a result of contact with AAVE speakers.

In Fasold and Wolfram (1970), it is suggested that, historically, *didn't* in AAVE underwent a number of phonological processes that yielded the pronunciation [ɪnt]. Due to the similarity of this pronunciation with the already existing *ain't* [ent] found in other contexts, the two forms merged to yield *ain't* in the preterit (69–70). Rickford (1977) extended this argument to account for the synchronic derivation of *ain't* in past contexts.

> BE [Black English] allows the morphophonemic condensation of certain auxiliaries in ways quite unparalleled in SE [Standard English] or white nonstandard dialects. "Don't," for instance, can be reduced to a single nasal vowel . . . and "didn't" can be reduced to *ẽnt*, *ẽnt* or *ĩn*. It is a result of this latter process that BE speakers can use ain't for "didn't" . . . (203)

Rickford (1977) further noted that this process of initial voiced stop deletion that affects auxiliaries in AAVE is comparable to similar processes found in a number of English Creoles (see also Rickford, 1974, 1980). In an article on variability in the use of *doz* in Guyanese creole, Rickford discussed the factors that influence the deletion of initial [d]: "Since we are dealing with the removal of a consonant, we would expect consonantal environments to favor the rule and a preceding vowel . . . to disfavor it" (1980:82). If the *ain't* used in (NEG past) environments is synchronically derived from *didn't* as proposed by Rickford, then one might expect the preceding phonological environment to have some influence on this variation. Therefore, one factor group considered as a constraint on the (NEG past) variation was preceding phonological environment, with the factors obstruent consonant, sonorant consonant, and vowel.

In contrast to the proposal that *ain't* derives from *didn't*, Debose (1994) argued that, "AAVE *ain't* is tense–aspect neutral, and AAVE sentences derive their tense/aspect interpretation from the stativity of the predicate" (128). In

a number of creole languages, the distinction in verb stativity is tied in with notions of time reference. For example, in Gullah the combination of *ain't* with non-stative verbs yields a past time reference interpretation, whereas with stative verbs reference may be to past or present (Mufwene, 1993).

(36) They ain't tell us that too much. (97)
'They didn't tell us that very/too much.'
(37) I ain't know Buster been your leader . . . I didn't know that. (96)
'I didn't know Buster was your leader.'
(38) I ain't blame you. (101)
'I don't blame you.'

The empirical evidence, however, suggests that no such distinction is made between stative and non-stative predicates in AAVE. In the data considered for this study, the combination of *ain't* with both types of predicates yields a past tense interpretation.

(39) He looked nice though. I ain't know he had no curl.
(40) I ain't say nobody said nothing 'bout no sick.

Nevertheless, the stative/non-stative distinction may be relevant to this variation, as it is said to be in varieties of mesolectal Guyanese, where *didn't* is more attracted to stative predicates for past marking (Bickerton, 1975:95). Stativity was tested, therefore, to determine whether any traces of a distinction between stative and non-stative predicates could be found in the (NEG past) constructions.

Finally, Fasold and Wolfram (1970) noted that, "*ain't* is often used with multiple negation, leading to sentences like *He ain't nobody*, *He ain't did nothing*, and *He ain't go nowhere*" (70). This factor group was tested, therefore, to determine whether multiple negative constructions show a stronger preference for *ain't* in past contexts than nonmultiple negative constructions, as such evidence might suggest a stylistic constraint on the (NEG past) variation.

Table 15 shows the effects of these factor groups on the occurrence of *ain't* in (NEG past) environments. None of the factor groups tested had any significant effect on the (NEG past) variation. The results for preceding phonological environment show the strongest preference for *ain't* in the environment of a preceding vowel and the weakest in the environment of an obstruent consonant. This pattern, though not significant, is actually the opposite of what would be expected if *ain't* were derived from *didn't* through phonologically conditioned reduction of initial [d].[34] For stativity, the difference between the two factor weights was only .03 probability. It is clear, therefore, that the stative/non-stative distinction also has no significant effect on the (NEG past) variation. Finally, multiple negation was also not significant to this variation. However, it is perhaps important to note that the probability of *ain't* occurring in (NEG past) environments is greater in multiple negative constructions than

TABLE 15. *Percentages and probabilities of* ain't *in* (NEG past) *environments*

	%	*N*	Weight
Preceding phonological env.*			
Sonorant consonant	36	5	.33
Obstruent consonant	11	1	.11
Vowel	40	56	.40
Stativity*			
Stative	41	29	.39
Non-stative	36	33	.36
Multiple negation*			
Nonmultiple negative	36	50	.35
Multiple negative	55	12	.54
Input probability = .375			
Total chi-square = 4.8232			
Chi-square/cell = .4385			

*Not significant.

in nonmultiple negative constructions, as observed in Fasold and Wolfram (1970).

Before considering the implications of these findings, we can look briefly at the evidence from inverted constructions. There are five sentences in the data in which the main clause auxiliary *ain't* or *didn't* is supported by *did* in a tag construction.

(41) I ain't give you none, Boo, did I?
(42) You ain't expect to find her over here, did you?
(43) He didn't help you, did he?
(44) When you was a little boy, you didn't go two inches from home, did you?
(45) You didn't expect to find her over here, did you?

Note in sentences (46) and (47) that no other auxiliary can be substituted for *did* in the tag.

(46) I ain't give you none, Boo, *do I?/*am I?/*have I?
(47) You ain't expect to find her over here, *do you?/*are you?/*have you?

And tense neutral *not* cannot be substituted for *ain't* in these constructions.

(48) *I not give you none, Boo, did I?
(49) *You not expect to find her over here, did you?

Similarly, there were sentences involving *ain't* and *didn't* in main clause interrogative inverted constructions.[35]

(50) Why ain't/*not y'all tell me not to fold this up?
(51) Why ain't/*not you give them to your brother?
(52) Didn't grandma send you to the store to get it?
(53) Didn't I tell you he fell and broke three-four ribs?

This evidence suggests that *ain't* is not a tense–aspect neutral auxiliary, but instead represents an alternative way of expressing past negated *do*-support. Given the high frequency of *didn't* tokens in the data (62%), it seems reasonable to argue that *didn't* is part of the underlying AAVE grammar and not part of a separate SE system. Therefore, the (NEG past) variation is most likely part of a single system such that *ain't* and *didn't* are alternative surface realizations of the same underlying category.[36]

It is interesting to note, however, that (NEG past) is the only variable involving *ain't* for which *ain't* is not the preferred variant. One explanation for this may be that *didn't* is in the process of replacing *ain't* as the negative of *did* in AAVE. According to Labov et al. (1968), *ain't* is used in past contexts almost exclusively by young AAVE speakers, whereas adults hardly ever use the form (255–256). More investigation into the effects of age-grading on this variable may thus reveal a change in progress. Another possible explanation for the preference of *didn't* over *ain't*, however, may have to do with the speaker group itself. As noted earlier, most of the speakers for this project were reported to have some degree of contact with speakers of dialects other than AAVE. As a result, the findings in this study may not represent the most conservative vernacular. The 38% frequency of *ain't* in these data may be compared to findings reported in a study done by Ash and Myhill in Philadelphia, who reported up to a 20% frequency of *ain't* in past contexts for Black speakers who had considerable contact with Whites, but up to an 80% frequency of *ain't* in past contexts for Blacks who had little contact with Whites (1986:39, Figure 3).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The findings presented in this article are summarized in Table 16. With the exception of a few near-categorical auxiliaries, all of the negative forms examined in this study seem to be involved in patterns of variation inherent to a single system. The near-categorical use of *wasn't* over *weren't* in copular environments and the strong preference for *don't* over *doesn't* in (NEG PRES) environments suggest that person–number inflection is not part of the AAVE grammar for past copular and present *do*-support constructions. Instead, the forms *weren't* and *doesn't* seem to be marginally incorporated from SE. It is not clear whether this pattern also extends to present perfect constructions because both *haven't* and *hasn't* are rare in the data. However, these results seem to correspond to findings concerning subject–verb concord in affirmative constructions, for which it has been said that "there is no entry in the

TABLE 16. *Summary of findings*

	Variables	Auxilaries	*N*	%	Predicates
Copular					
Present tense	(NEG COP)	*ain't*	154	63	NP, AdjP, Loc,
		Contr. *be* + *not*	66	27	Ving, Gon(na)
		Full *be* + *n(o)t*	13	5	
		not	13	5	
		Total	246	100	
Past tense	near-categorical	*wasn't*	36	97	NP, AdjP, Loc,
		weren't	1	3	Ving, Gon(na)
		Total	37	100	
Non-copular					
Present tense	(NEG PRES)[a]	*don't*	81	86	Vbse
		doesn't	13	14	
		Total	94	100	
	near-categorical[b]	*don't*	263	99.6	Vbse
		doesn't	1	.4	
		Total	264	100	
	(NEG GOT(TA))	*ain't*	41	65	Got(ta)
		don't	22	35	
		Total	63	100	
Present perfect	(NEG PERF)	*ain't*	29	71	Vpp
		have + *not*	12	29	
		Total	41	100	
Past tense	(NEG PAST)	*didn't*	100	62	Vbse
		ain't	62	38	
		Total	162	100	

[a]With 3rd singular subjects.
[b]With non-3rd singular subjects.

NNE dictionary for *has*, *does*, *says*, or *were*: if the NNE speaker is to learn them, they must be imported from 'outside' in some sense" (Labov et al., 1968:250). The only verb that is sensitive to person–number distinctions in these data is the present copula with negative forms of *am*, *is*, and *are* all used consistently with rules of subject–verb concord in SE.

Where the bulk of the variation takes place in the NEG data is in those environments for which *ain't* is a variant (i.e., (NEG COP), (NEG PERF), (NEG GOT(TA)), and (NEG PAST)). In (NEG COP) environments, there is no evidence that the copula is grammatically incorporated into the AAVE system in any pattern similar to creole varieties (where copular absence is higher in auxiliary environments than in traditional copular environments). Instead, evidence of a phonological conditioning on the *not* variant suggests that the copula is underlyingly present in the AAVE grammar, but variably deleted. And evidence from tags in (NEG COP) environments supports the notion that *ain't*

functions as the negative of present tense *be*. For present perfect constructions, the fact that *ain't* selects past participial predicates similar to those selected by *have* + *not* in SE perfect constructions suggests that *ain't* functions more like the negative of *have* than a tense–aspect neutral auxiliary. Before we can establish that *ain't* and *have* + *not* are variants of the same underlying category, however, we must look more closely at affirmative constructions to get a better sense of whether AAVE actually has an underlying *have* category. The only instance in which *ain't* varies with present negated *do* in the AAVE data is with the predicate *got(ta)*. However, it appears that *ain't* functions as the negative of *have* rather than of *do* in these environments. In past *do*-support constructions, on the other hand, the form *ain't* seems to function as the negative of *did*. This argument is supported by evidence of the use of *ain't* in inverted interrogative constructions and by the fact that main clausal *ain't* is supported by *did* in tag questions. Given the high percentage of *do* usage in both present and past constructions, it seems clear that the category *do* is part of the underlying grammar of AAVE.

Overall, *ain't* behaves like three distinct auxiliaries in these data, representing forms of present copular *be*, present perfect *have*, and past *do*, as the lexical entries for *ain't* in copular, perfect, and *do*-support constructions illustrate:

$$ain't_1\text{: } be\begin{bmatrix}\text{TNS: PRES}\\ \text{POL: NEG}\end{bmatrix} \qquad ain't_2\text{: } have\begin{bmatrix}\text{TNS: PRES}\\ \text{POL: NEG}\end{bmatrix}$$

$$ain't_3\text{: } do\begin{bmatrix}\text{TNS: PAST}\\ \text{POL: NEG}\end{bmatrix}$$

These findings support Hypothesis 1—that *ain't* represents negative forms of the auxiliaries *be*, *have*, and *do*. And, with the possible exception of the (NEG PRES) variation, they support the monosystemic account, such that the alternations all derive from one underlying system. The alternations among the *ain't* auxiliaries and their corresponding variants might best be described as morpholexical alternations, possibly as shown for the variants $ain't_1$ and *isn't*.

$$ain't_1\text{: } be\begin{bmatrix}\text{TNS: PRES}\\ \text{POL: NEG}\end{bmatrix} \sim isn't\text{: } be\begin{bmatrix}\text{TNS: PRES}\\ \text{POL: NEG}\\ \text{PERS: 3rd}\\ \text{NUM: SING}\end{bmatrix}$$

Though it is not clear at this point how these findings would fit in with theories of the diachronic development of AAVE, it seems that evidence from *do*-support constructions should serve as a key factor here. Two possible explanations come to mind to account for the unique use of *ain't* in past contexts in AAVE. One is that the alternations between *ain't* and *didn't* are the

result of decreolization, such that what was once an all-purpose negator is now being replaced by more standard forms through contact with SE. The other is that the use of *ain't* in past contexts represents a process of divergence, such that AAVE is becoming more unlike other English varieties by extending the use of *ain't* to *do*-support constructions by analogy with the *ain't* auxiliaries used in copular and perfect constructions.

The first explanation seems to be the more probable one here if we consider what has been said in the literature about earlier stages of AAVE. In Schneider's (1989) analysis of the exslave recordings collected by the Federal Writer's Project, he noted that 4 speakers produced a total of 10 tokens of *ain't* in present contexts (201).

(54) I ain't gwine to tell no mo' 'cause I ain't to make statement and testify 'bout sumpin' *I ain't know 'bout*. (201; my italics)

Recall though that *ain't* is never used as a present *do*-support auxiliary in the Columbus data, and past *do*-support constructions are the only ones for which *ain't* is not the vernacular norm. Assuming that Schneider's study is not confusing AAVE with Gullah, a language for which such constructions are grammatical even today (see Mufwene, 1993), this evidence may be an indication that *ain't* has been replaced by *don't* in contemporary AAVE and is now being gradually replaced by *didn't* in past contexts. The fact that *ain't* is notably less frequent than *didn't* in past contexts and the observation of age-grading on the use of this *ain't* (as noted by Labov et al., 1968) could then be explained as part of a general trend for the more standard forms to replace *ain't* in negated *do*-support constructions. A possible motivation for this change might be the ambiguity discussed earlier between present perfect and past interpretations when *ain't* selects base form predicates. And a similar ambiguity between present and past interpretations (with base form predicates) might have inspired the change in present contexts, absent of any other disambiguating techniques (such as stativity of the predicate).

It may also be the case though that neither of these explanations holds, and that the similarities between AAVE and creole languages are simply the result of similar patterns of development taking place in languages involved in contact situations. Regardless of what the diachronic implications are, we can conclude from this study that by and large the system of negation in AAVE is not creole-like, but English-like. And such information should be of particular importance to linguists as we work toward constructing more formal grammars of the African American Vernacular English syntax.

NOTES

1. The terms "monosystemic" and "bisystemic" represent the terminology used most recently in the literature to describe these two positions (see, e.g., Debose, 1994). Other, more-or-less synonymous terms include "intrasystemic" versus "intersystemic" variation and "inherent variability" versus "dialect mixture."

2. For the purposes of this study, the term "copular" is used in its most general sense to refer to sentences containing the non-verbal predicates NP (nominal), AdjP (adjectival), and Loc (locative), as well as the verbal predicates Ving (progressive) and Gon(na) (future). When it is necessary to distinguish between the two, the terms "traditional copular environments" and "auxiliary environments" are used. The term "non-copular" is reserved for those types of predication involving verbal predicates other than Ving and Gon(na).

3. Of this total, there are 19 tokens of *wasn't*, 11 tokens of wa'n't [wəʔn̩t], 5 tokens of *was not*, and 1 token of *weren't*.

4. These findings parallel observations made in Labov et al. (1968:246) that *was(n't)* is the normal form of the past tense copula in both affirmative and negative constructions.

5. Past perfect constructions are not analyzed in this article because no negative auxiliaries were found in past perfect constructions in the data set.

6. Winford (1983) cited the following realizations of *eh* in TC: [ɛ], [ɛ̃], [ɛn], [ɛnt] (210).

7. For the non-inflected variant, there are 80 tokens of *don't* (pronounced [dõnt] or [õ(n)(t)]) and 1 token of *do not*. The inflected variant includes 11 tokens of *doesn't* and 2 tokens of *does not*.

8. The term "regular" is used here to refer to those verbs that inflect for third-person singular in SAE simply by the addition of an *-s* suffix, in contrast to "irregular" verbs, which undergo other changes either instead of or in addition to the *-s* affixation.

9. Compiled from data provided in Table 3-23 of the Labov et al. study for the "Club members," "Oscar brothers," and "Lames."

10. Percentage calculated from the figures provided in Table 3-23 of the Labov et al. study for the Inwood group.

11. See Poplack and Tagliamonte (1989) for an analysis of these effects on *s*-marking in early Black English.

12. In the (NEG PRES) data, such aspectual distinctions are related to the stativity of the predicate. The combination of *don't* or *doesn't* with a non-stative predicate in a present context yields a habitual interpretation. The combination of the (NEG PRES) variants with a stative predicate in a present context yields a non-habitual interpretation (unless otherwise specified by the context).

Habituality and verb stativity in present *do*-support constructions

a. _____Vstative	I do not like his stepmom. He does not have a family.	Non-habitual
b. _____Vnon-stative	And we don't lock our doors. My brain does not function til after twelve.	Habitual
c. _____Vstative + hab. adv.	Then they have the days when everybody's moody and don't want each other to touch each other.	Habitual

13. See Bailey, Maynor, and Cukor-Avila (1989) for an analysis of the effects of this constraint on the use of verbal *-s* in early modern English.

14. Labov (1969) focused only on *is* variability, while analyzing *are* absence in terms of a general rule of *r*-desulcalization. Wolfram (1974), however, showed that the constraints on general *r*-desulcalization are not identical to those on *are* "deletion" and argued, therefore, that tokens of *are* also be included in analyses of AAVE copular variability.

15. See Rickford et al. (1991) for a fuller discussion of the different results these formulae yield and the problems that the different methods of tabulation create for comparisons across studies.

16. This is only a partial reproduction of Tables 5 and 6 in the Rickford et al. study. Also included in their tables are figures for following phonological environment, age, and a miscellaneous factor in the following grammatical environment group.

17. Note that, although the factors personal pronoun and preceding vowel do overlap to an extent, they do not include exactly the same tokens. In some cases, for example, a sentence may have a personal pronoun subject, but the preceding phonological environment of the (NEG COP) variant is a consonant, as in *You still not back*. Of course, there are subjects other than personal pronouns that end in vowels and contribute to the preceding vowel factor, as in *People from this area aren't going*.

18. The figures that most deviated from the affirmative findings for the contracted copula were those for preceding phonological environment and following grammatical environment. To deter-

mine whether the inclusion of first-person singular subjects and *it/that/what* subjects in any way skewed these results, a second run was done with these factors eliminated from the count. The variant *ain't* was also omitted from this second run to allow for a more exact comparison with affirmative findings. The results of the run for these two factor groups follow. Subject and person-number are not included in this table because the results for these factor groups were relatively unchanged from the first to the second run.

Percentages and probabilities of negative contracted *is* and *are* tokens out of full, contracted, and *not* tokens

	%	*N*	Weight
Preceding phonological env.*			
Consonant	27	3	.31
Vowel	52	15	.46
Following grammatical env.			
NP	75	3	.86
AdjP	23	3	.20
Loc	67	2	.67
Ving	31	4	.21
Gon(na)	86	6	.87

*Not significant.

For this run, preceding phonological environment was again not significant. However, the ordering of the constraints more closely resembled the affirmative pattern, with vowels favoring contraction over consonants. By contrast, following grammatical environment was chosen as significant in this run. However, the patterning of the constraints still in no way resembled the hierarchy found in affirmative constructions. The absence of such patterning, however, may be owing to the small number of tokens for this run, $N = 40$. The contracted copula accounted for 45% of the tokens ($N = 18$).

19. Two additional runs were done to determine whether the inclusion of *ain't* in the overall count was in any way responsible for the divergent results between affirmative copular absence (shown in Table 9 in the text) and *not* in the following grammatical environment group. In one run, all tokens of *ain't* were excluded from the overall count, so that *not* was counted as a percentage of full, contracted, and *not* tokens. In the other run, tokens of *ain't* and *not* were combined as the application value to determine whether the two auxiliaries were functioning jointly as negators of the zero-copula, as proposed by the bisystemic account in Option 1. The results for following grammatical environment for these two runs are presented as follows:

Percentages and probabilities of *not* out of full, contracted, and *not* tokens (column 1) and of *ain't/not* out of all (NEG COP) tokens (column 2)

	Not			*Ain't/Not*		
	%	*N*	Weight	%	*N*	Weight
Following grammatical env.*/**						
NP[a]	0	0	0	60	6	.54
AdjP	56	5	.50	78	28	.81
Loc	33	1	.22	75	6	.73
Ving	50	6	.44	78	25	.78
Gon(na)	17	1	.25	80	24	.86

[a]Knockout factors for the *not* run.
*Factor groups not selected as significant in column 1.
**Factor groups not selected as significant in column 2.

For both runs, the following grammatical environment factor group was still not significant, and neither of the patterns exactly resembled the affirmative hierarchy shown in Table 9 in the text. The pattern for *ain't/not* came closer to this hierarchy with the exception of the factor weight for adjectival predicates. However, the number of tokens (particularly in NP and Loc environments) is too small to place any significance on this patterning at this point.

20. Evidence from tags also supports the notion that there is an underlying copula in the position before *not*: *Y'all not supposed to go up them steps, are you?*

21. In these data, there were a total of 14 negative forms in *yes–no* interrogative inversion constructions. With third-person singular subjects, there were 10 tokens of *ain't* and 2 tokens of *isn't*. With plural/second-person singular subjects, there was 1 token of *ain't* and 1 of *aren't*. There were 12 negative tags corresponding to main clause copular constructions, all involving third-person singular subjects. Of these 12, there were 7 tokens of *ain't* and 5 of *isn't*.
22. In Trinidadian Creole, the tense–aspect neutral negative auxiliary *eh* is never used in tag constructions (Winford, personal communication, 1994).
23. There were also two sentences in the data in which *ain't* is supported by a copular tag. These also give the impression that *ain't* is interpreted as a form of the copula in these environments: *She ain't sick, is she?* and *You ain't gon go to sleep on me today, are you?*
24. I address these claims in more detail in my analysis of the (NEG past) variable.
25. Another way in which person–number distinctions might be relevant here is in the distribution of the *have + not* forms themselves. Out of the 12 *have + not* tokens found in the AAVE data, there were 8 of *haven't* and 2 of *have not* in non-third-person singular environments and 2 of *hasn't* in third-person singular environments. Although it appears that third-person singular subject–verb concord does play a role in these data, these numbers were too small to draw any definite conclusions about the extent of its use. It should be noted, however, that most studies of the affirmative perfect have focused on *have* rather than *has*, finding that subject–verb concord does not extend to third-person singular environments for this verb (see, e.g., Labov et al., 1968:250).
26. There were two sentences in the data in which the predicate differed from that which would be selected by *have + not* in SE.

(a) She ain't ate nothing yet.
'She hasn't eaten anything yet.'
(b) I gave him the key and everything. He still ain't came, still ain't came.
'I gave him the key and everything. He still hasn't come, still hasn't come.'

These sentences were omitted from the (NEG perf) count because it was not clear whether *have + not* forms could vary with *ain't* in these environments.

(c) ?She hasn't ate nothing yet.
(d) ?He still hasn't came—still hasn't came.

However, it may be that past participles are not completely well established in the AAVE grammar, but instead alternate between preterite and past participial verb forms.
27. The use of *ain't* in sentence (25) is discussed in more detail with regards to the (NEG past) variation.
28. There are also a few sentences in the data that suggest that this ambiguity between present perfect and past interpretations is possible with past inflected predicates, unless the meaning is disambiguated by the context.

(a) Speaker 1: He ain't had no drawers on him. That's what trip me out.
Speaker 2: He sure didn't.
Speaker 1: He had on some shorts and ain't had no drawers on.
b) Speaker 1: I ain't ate.
Speaker 2: How come you didn't eat?
(c) Speaker 1: That's the first time a white person called me a "nigger," man.
Speaker 2: Brenda ain't knew nothing about it, I bet.

Absent of any context these constructions could presumably be interpreted as present perfect or past (e.g., *He ain't had no drawers on him yesterday* (past tense) or *He ain't had no drawers on him since he left home* (present perfect)). There were seven such sentences in the data. However, these sentences were left out of the (NEG past) count (to be discussed) because *ain't* only seems to vary with *didn't* before base form predicates.
29. It is interesting to note, however, that the (NEG pres) and (NEG perf) variables do not extend to *got(ta)* environments. In other words, there is no variation between *ain't* and *have + not* nor between *don't* and *doesn't* in the environment of *got(ta)*. This fact may be owing to some sort of formality co-occurrence restriction that renders the more formal of these variants inappropriate for certain levels of vernacular speech.
30. See Wolfram (1973:157) for a report of this alternation in Puerto Rican English.

31. In the *got(ta)* constructions, there were two instances of *don't* in tags and two in inverted interrogatives.

(a) I bet you they got babies in strollers, don't they?
(b) You gotta open a book, don't you?
(c) Don't he got an adapter?
(d) Man, don't-don't he got a . . . Mama, don't he got a Nintendo?

32. Because there were only three sentences in the data, this variation was omitted from the (NEG COP) count.

33. Omitted from the (NEG PAST) count were three sentences in which the negative form was reduced to 'n't [nt], thus yielding ambiguous constructions.

(a) I'n't think he even had a bottle.
(b) Speaker 1: You'n't go?
Speaker 2: Yeah we went.
(c) I'n't think so. Did you?

34. To determine whether combining sonorant and obstruent consonants for the preceding phonological environment factor group would produce any different results, a second run was done with these two factors collapsed and compared to the vowel factor. Still no factor groups were selected as significant.

Percentages and probabilities of *ain't* in (NEG PAST) environments with consonant factors collapsed

	%	*N*	Weight
Preceding phonological env.*			
Consonant	26	6	.24
Vowel	40	56	.40
Stativity*			
Stative	41	29	.40
Non-stative	36	33	.36
Multiple negation*			
Nonmultiple negative	36	50	.35
Multiple negative	55	12	.56

Input probability = .379
Total chi-square = 3.9438
Chi-square/cell = 0.4930

*Not significant.

35. There were eight sentences involving *ain't* and *didn't* in main clause interrogative inverted constructions. It is not clear whether *ain't* in past contexts extends to tag constructions as well, because only 4 tokens of *didn't* were found in these environments: (a) *I got you on that one, didn't I?* (b) *But he knew he had holes, didn't he?* (c) *He stayed out there all night, didn't he?* (d) *The coat Gary had of yours got sold, stolen and sold, didn't it Joey?*

36. For the purposes of this study, I am not concerned with whether *do* is analyzed as belonging to the underlying grammar or being inserted by a *do*-support rule. The important point is that it behaves the same way in both AAVE and SE, except in the realization of its surface variants.

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